



WILDFLOWER NEWS

'Growing Nature's Garden'

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Welcome to the March Wildflower News!

Spring is coming! March is the traditional month to buy seeds and there are two Seedy Sunday and Seedy Saturday events happening. Details are in the Events section.

It's not too late to stratify seeds this month, but a bit early to sow species that don't need any pre-treatment. However, sometimes when it is so white and grey outside we just need to see some green sprouts!



Showy aster empty seed heads. Photo by Liz Deleeuw

Events

March 13 – How Including Nature-based Solutions in the Zoning Bylaw can Restore Ecological Functioning in Edmonton’s River Valley

Speaker: Grant Pearsell

Place: Online on Zoom

Time: 5:30 pm

Cost: Free

Register at nsrivervalley@gmail.com

Mar 15 – Native Alberta Bee Council: The Wonderful World of Bees

Speaker: Megan Evans

Place: Online on Zoom

Time: 7:00-8:30 pm

Cost: Free

[Click here to register](#)

March 18 – Sakaw Community Gardens Seedy Saturday

Place: Sakaw Elementary School gym,
5730-11a ave

Time: 1:00-3:00 pm

Cost: Free admission

This will be the second year for the Sakaw Gardens Seedy Saturday and it will be bigger this year. ENPS will be selling seeds.

March 26 – Edmonton Seedy Sunday

Place: Alberta Avenue Community Hall,
9210-118 ave

Time: 11:00 am-4:00 pm

Cost: Free admission

Finally, we can visit the Edmonton Seedy Sunday again. This will be the first time in 3 years! ENPS will be selling seeds.

If you miss these seed-buying opportunities, you can buy our seeds at various stores and greenhouses. The list is on the ENPS website, under [Plant Info - Source](#).

March 27 – What's in Your Riparian Area? A Brief Tour of Riparian Plants

Speaker: Tonya Lwiwski

Place: Online on Zoom

Time: 7:00-8:30 pm

Cost: Free

[Click here to register](#)

Coming in April:

Apr 22 – 35th Alberta Native Plant Council Hybrid Workshop: “How Plants Inspire Us”

Presenters and vendors will share how plants have guided them in their lives and careers from the field, to the kitchen, to the canvas, to traditions and culture.

Place: Cattail Crossing Golf & Country Club, Sturgeon County. This event will have an online option for those who cannot attend in person.

[Click here for more details](#)

If you would like to post an event that involves native plants, please email us at engedmonton@gmail.com

News

Elk Island National Park draft management plan released for public review

From Dale Kirkland, Superintendent, Elk Island National Park

Until March 17, 2023, Canadians across the country have an opportunity to shape the future of Elk Island National Park. Have your say! The plan, feedback survey, and additional details can be accessed online in both official languages [at this webpage](#).

Are Hawrelak Park trees the canary in the coal mine?

from River Valley News

Bob Priebe, former Director of Parks Planning at the City of Edmonton, asks if the proposed Hawrelak Park tree cutting may be the proverbial “canary in the coal mine.”

[Full article here](#)

Let’s rethink Hawrelak Park plan

from River Valley News

[Full article here](#)

If you have a news item involving native plants that you would like posted, please email us at engedmonton@gmail.com

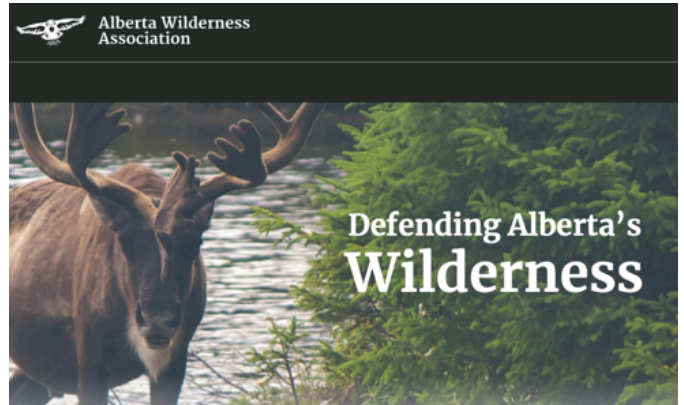
Website of the Month

This month's featured webpage is the Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA)
<https://albertawilderness.ca>

The Alberta Wilderness Association is an excellent province-wide environmental organization. If you want to keep up with all the environmental happenings in the province, you can subscribe to the newsletter which will give you all the action alerts.

Also you can subscribe to the magazine, *The Wild Lands Advocate*, published 4 times a year.

AWA Membership is only \$25 for a lifetime membership - a real deal!



Native Plants Photo Feature

We are waiting impatiently for spring.

Share your pictures with us and we may use them in the Native Plants Photo Feature section of the Wildflower News!

- We can use up to 3 pictures of your garden, or of native plants seen when you are out and about.
- Include the details of the photo in a short description in the body of the email.
- Please send the pictures to Liz Deleeuw at liz.d@telus.net. We will credit the pictures appropriately.

Photos from Liz DeLeeuw's front yard



Left: Blue clematis, also known as purple clematis, *Clematis occidentalis*, can be used as a ground cover creeping over the ground or a vine. Right: Prairie crocus, *Pulsatilla nuttalliana*, with kinnikinnick cultivar sourced from a local nursery.
Photos by Liz DeLeeuw

Articles

Erratum: Reed Canarygrass – A “Cryptic Invader”

In the January 2023 issue of Wildflower News article, *Reed Canarygrass – A “Cryptic Invader,”* the reference was incomplete. The full reference is: Reed canary grass at Elk Island National Park; REPORT TO PARKS CANADA Contract No.: 085-5P426 Genetic analysis of Reed Canary Grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) in Elk Island.

Roadside Ditches: Space for Restoring Prairie Ecology

by Brenda Bohmer

It's not a new idea to plant native grasses and wildflowers in ditches. Others in North America have been doing this for quite some time, but there are not many examples in Alberta. Thanks to our small group of volunteers, we now have a 1.5-mile-long demonstration site in Camrose County, Alberta.

Ditches are a functional part of any non-urban road system. They function to drain water away from the roadway and in extreme weather may provide storm water detention. These ditches could also provide space for ecological connectivity, restoration of prairie ecology and pollinator corridors.

In 2019, Camrose County, reconstructed 8 miles of gravel roads near my farm. What an opportunity! Our small group, feeling the call to act, made a proposal to the County and received approval to seed 1.5 miles of ditch with native grasses. We put together a plan for site preparation and InnoTech Alberta was consulted to determine the most appropriate species for our site. A County crew hydroseeded the native mix consisting of blue grama grass, tickle grass, June grass and Rocky Mountain fescue, in October 2020.

In Spring 2021, blue grama and tickle grasses were the first to emerge (along with many weeds that were likely in the existing topsoil). The summer of 2021 kept volunteers busy with trying to remove and reduce the weeds. Hand pulling, spot mowing and digging with small tree spades were the most common methods used. On-site informational signage was installed with funding provided by the Alberta Native Plant Council (ANPC) small grant program. The Edmonton Native Plant Society provided wildflower plugs and seeds that were planted in the ditch amongst the native grasses. By the time autumn arrived, the 1.5-mile ditch looked pretty good!



The ditch in fall - blue grama grass in seed. Photo by Brenda Bohmer

The June grass and Rocky Mountain fescue became more obvious in the spring of 2022. The wildflowers began to show more blooms and, of course, by early summer, more weeds popped up as well. Weeding bees were organized, and volunteers were called upon again. Some spot spraying of Canada thistle occurred with great success! Slightly fewer hours were spent weeding during the summer of 2022 as compared to 2021.

2022 turned out to be a wet year in this area with approximately 16 inches of rain. Half a mile of the ditch was wet most of the spring and summer. A July hailstorm flattened and damaged the wildflowers. Foxtail barley thrives under wet conditions and was dominant in that section. In 2021, the area was able to be spot mowed, but this was not possible in 2022 due to standing water in much of the ditch. It will be interesting to observe what will happen in this stretch of the ditch in future years.

The smooth brome along the inside/field edge of select areas along the ditch looms as a serious threat to the native species. It is known to be aggressive and can readily encroach into areas where it may not be wanted. At this point, we feel this could threaten the viability of the project in places where smooth brome is growing adjacent to the ditch project. Any ideas on how we could relieve the pressure from the smooth brome would be appreciated.



The ditch in summer with grasses in flower. Photo by Brenda Bohmer

2023 will be Year 3 for the Ditch Project. We hope to see more growth and spreading of the native grasses and wildflowers and definitely hope to weed less! We continue to observe and learn from this site.

We welcome you to visit the site and provide your ideas and comments.

We thank all of our partners (Camrose County, Alberta Native Plant Council, InnoTech Alberta, Edmonton Native Plant Society) and of course, our volunteers, for their continued devotion to help restore this 1.5-mile section of ditch to a native and biodiverse roadside.

Easy to Grow Wildflowers - Smooth Fleabane, *Erigeron glabellus*

By Cherry Dodd

The name fleabane is an old English word which means to banish fleas. It was the belief at the time that the dried plants repelled fleas.

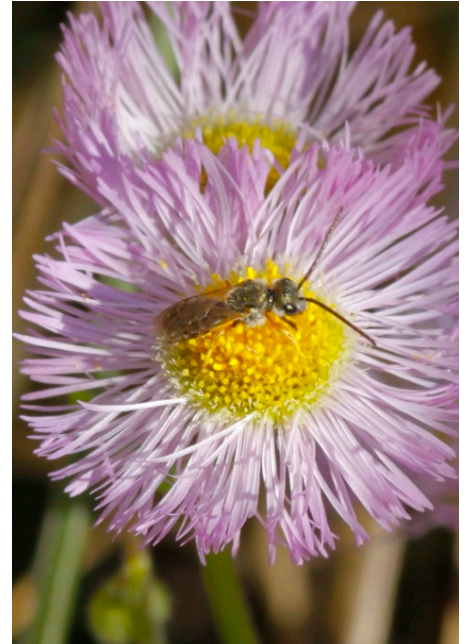
There are several species of fleabane native to the Edmonton area, but smooth fleabane is the easiest to grow from seed. The seeds don't need to be stratified. They can be planted in spring without any pre-treatment and germination is usually good. Your plants will bloom the second year, but sometimes they will surprise you and bloom the first year in late summer.

Smooth fleabane is a short, neat and compact perennial with dark green leaves, about 30 to 45cm tall. It usually starts blooming the first week of July and the pretty daisy-like flowers come in various shades of purple or pink. It will slowly grow into a larger clump, but it is not an aggressive spreader. It has a shallow fibrous root system and can easily be divided or moved.

Smooth fleabanes will thrive in most locations, except for a hot and dry site. They adapt to any soil and are happy in sun or semi-shade. Plant them in the front of the border so they don't get lost behind taller plants, and mulch them so they don't dry out too quickly. They do self-seed a little so by the second or third year you should have some extra plants to play with or give away.

Botanical Meanings of Names:

Erigeron [er-IJ-er-on] From the Greek *eri* (early) and *geron* (old man), referring to the fluffy, white seed heads; *glabellus* [GLA-bell-us] smooth or hairless.



Close-up of smooth fleabane, *Erigeron glabellus*. Photo by Tess Stieben



Smooth fleabane, *Erigeron glabellus*. Photo by Cherry Dodd

Starting Easy to Grow Seeds Indoors in March

By Cherry Dodd

I prefer to start seeds inside in April. That way I can put them outside in a shady spot on warmer above-zero days and just bring them in at night. I don't need to harden them off, and often I don't need to move them to bigger pots, so it's a lot less work.

However, with these brighter March days it is so tempting to just start and grow! So here is how you do it. This is just my method, and I think every gardener has their own system. Don't be afraid to play and experiment to find out what works best for you. Remember that native seeds have their own schedule and it varies according to the year and also according to the month.

Sometimes a species like gaillardia will germinate in less than a week and at other times the seedlings won't emerge for a month! You have to be patient.

- Choose the "easy to grow" species. They are meadow blazingstar, smooth fleabane, gaillardia, giant hyssop, wild blue flax, golden-aster, and wild bergamot (monarda).
- Choose the size of pot that suits you. I prefer to plant in small six-pack cells so I don't have to thin out or transplant seedlings, but the six-packs tend to dry out quickly, so some people prefer to use a large pot that can hold a lot of seedlings and then transplant them to individual pots once they are big enough.

A compromise could be the small square starter pots, less than two inches in diameter and about the size of each six-pack cell. They can be put together into a shallow tray.

I plant 4 seeds in each pot and end up with a germination rate of 1 to 3 plants in each pot. These don't need to be separated and they can just be popped into a larger container when they outgrow their pot. Native plants usually don't mind being planted out as a group of 3 or less.

To start, I use some seed starter mix that is already damp. Fill the pot to the brim and then tap it on the table sharply to settle the mix.

If the seeds are tiny don't cover them, just press them gently into the mix and then mist the top with a spray bottle. Long, narrow seeds like meadow blazingstar can be poked into the potting mix with the fluff side up. For other seeds check the directions on the package. Usually you just have to cover the seeds lightly.

I put my seeds on top of the fridge to germinate and check soil moisture and germination every day. I keep the pots in shallow trays so I can water from below. Some people like to use a cover on their pots, but I prefer the soil to get good air circulation.



Wild bergamot (monarda) seedlings.
Photo by Liz DeLeeuw



Gaillardia seedlings.
Photo by Liz DeLeeuw

Once your seeds germinate, move them to a grow light until the weather is warm enough to start hardening them off outside. Remember to start them in a shady location when hardening off. Most native seeds are ok with a bit of frost if you accidentally leave them outside overnight. However, gaillardia is frost sensitive.

Happy growing!

Next month in the Wildflower News:

A new series of articles on the flowers that are blooming in this month and where to see them. For April, there will be information about prairie crocus, three-flowered avens and prairie buttercup.

Aims of the Edmonton Native Plant Society:

- ❖ Promote knowledge of the Edmonton area native plants.
- ❖ Conserve our native plant species and their habitats.
- ❖ Preserve native plant species and habitat for the enjoyment of present and future generations.
- ❖ Educate individuals, business and local governments about native plants.

Lifetime ENPS Membership

You can now become an Edmonton Native Plant Society member for life. Memberships are \$20.
Purchase by email: enpsmembership@gmail.com
or visit one of our booths at plant events in your area.

ENPS members are also eligible for a free Lifetime Membership with Nature Alberta.

Please send compliments, concerns and questions to engedmonton@gmail.com
To unsubscribe, or subscribe, email engedmonton@gmail.com

We are expanding the Wildflower News Team and would like to welcome Liz Deleeuw who will be in charge of the Native Plants Photo Feature, Rachel Brown who will be responsible for News & Events, and Patsy Cotterill who is proofreading each issue.

We would also like to thank Michael Tolboom for providing graphic design assistance for Wildflower News

Cherry Dodd, editor | Maria Tan, publisher

www.edmontonnativeplantsociety.ca/



Three-flowered avens and gaillardia coming out from under the snow. Three-flowered avens is evergreen. Photo by Liz Deleeuw